

CLAIM AMENDMENTS:

Please amend the claims in the subject patent application as follows:

1. (currently amended) A process for preparing a silica/rubber blend which comprises (1) dispersing silica, a silica coupling agent, and a low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber throughout a cement of a conventional rubbery polymer wherein the silica, the silica coupling agent, and the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber are dispersed throughout the cement of the conventional rubbery polymer at a minimum temperature which is within the range of about 25°C to and a maximum temperature of 130°C, wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber has a weight average molecular weight which is within the range of 50,000 to 200,000, wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is selected from the group consisting of functionalized polybutadiene rubbers, functionalized polyisoprene rubbers, functionalized styrene-butadiene rubbers, and functionalized styrene-isoprene rubbers, wherein the cement of the conventional rubbery polymer is comprised of the conventional rubbery polymer and an organic solvent, and wherein the silica is present at a level which is within the range of 40 phr to 200 phr, and (2) subsequently recovering the silica/rubber blend from the cement of the conventional rubbery polymer-organic solvent.

2. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the low molecular weight end functionalized diene rubber has a weight average molecular weight that is within the range of about 65,000 to about 150,000.

3. (currently amended) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the treated silica and the silica coupling agent are dispersed throughout the cement of the rubbery polymer at a minimum temperature which is within the range of 25°C to and a maximum temperature of 90°C.

4. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 2 wherein the low molecular weight end-functionalized diene rubber is functionalized with a tetraalkoxysilane.

5. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 4 wherein the tetraalkoxysilane is tetraethoxysilane.

6. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 4 wherein the tetraalkoxysilane is tetramethoxysilane.

7. (canceled)

8. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the silica is present at a level which is within the range of 50 phr to 150 phr.

9. (currently amended) The process as specified in ~~claim 7~~ claim 1 wherein the silica coupling agent is present at a level which is within the range of 2 phr to 20 phr.

10. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 8 wherein the silica coupling agent is present at a level which is within the range of 3 phr to 15 phr.

11. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 9 wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is present at a level which is within the range of 4 phr to 20 phr.

12. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 10 wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is present at a level which is within the range of 5 phr to 15 phr.

13. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 11 wherein the silica coupling agent is present at a level which is within the range of 4 phr to 8 phr.

14. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 13 wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is present at a level which is within the range of 6 phr to 10 phr.

15. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 2 wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is comprised of repeat units that are derived from 1,3-butadiene and styrene.

16. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber is comprised of repeat units that are derived from 1,3-butadiene.

17. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 4 wherein the low molecular weight end functionalized diene rubber has a weight average molecular weight that is within the range of about 75,000 to about 125,000.

18. (currently amended) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the treated silica and the silica coupling agent are dispersed throughout the cement of the rubbery polymer at a minimum temperature which is within the range of 60°C to and a maximum

temperature of 90°C.

19. (previously presented) The process as specified in claim 1 wherein the silica is a precipitated silica having a particle size which is within the range of 7 nm to 60 nm.

20. (original) A tire which is comprised of a generally toroidal-shaped carcass with an outer circumferential tread, two spaced beads, at least one ply extending from bead to bead and sidewalls extending radially from and connecting said tread to said beads, wherein said tread is adapted to be ground-contacting, and wherein said tread is comprised of the silica/rubber blend made by the process specified in claim 1.